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THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .' James Connolly

THE WAGE STRUGGLE

THE NEWS that a renewed effort is being made to secure a new National Wage Agreement is of vital interest to all Irish workers. Following the rejection of the Proposed terms of the 14th round of wage increases (or the 2nd National Wage Agreement) by the delegates attending the special Irish Congress of Trade Unions special conference on June 24, it was on the cards that this move would take place.

The rejected offer would have given 9% on the first £30 of basic weekly pay; 7½% on the next £10 of basic weekly pay and 4% on any remaining part of basic wages. But in money terms the gap between the lower and higher paid worker would have widened if this agreement had gone through. For example, the worker earning £20 a week would have qualified for an increase over 15 months of £3.05, but the higher income worker earning a weekly wage of £35 would have got a rise of £3.87.

The draft agreement paid the usual lip-service to pie-in-the-sky objectives: 'The achievement of full employment, real increases in wages and salaries, preferential treatment for wage earners in lower income groups and the abolition of poverty.' All of these objectives are, of



course, impossible to attain under capitalism. The capitalist system is based on the pursuit of profits. Any attempt to interfere with the system to bring about

full employment, a levelling-up in incomes and the end of poverty would not be tolerated by the employers. If a scheme for the effective re-distribution of wealth made through profits was enforced, it would lead to the collapse of capitalism. According to the recent Lyons' survey, over 70% of the wealth of Ireland is owned by 5% of the population. A leading member of the Fianna Fail Government, Erskine Childers, stated at Donaghmoyny, on January 4, 1969, that a re-distribution of wealth in the 26 counties, through higher taxation, would 'discourage private enterprise, and encourage emigration of the dynamic executive groups so vital to the country.' A serious effort by the Government to curb profits in the interests of social justice, would, therefore lead immediately to the flight of capital, foreign and native, from this country.

A National Agreement, applying to all forms of income, is therefore inconceivable. There can never be any question of controlling profits, dividends and (although to a lesser extent) prices. The proposed National Wage Agreement, then,

continued overleaf

crescent closure

THE CRESCENT COLLEGE has long been regarded as one of the city's most durable institutions. Turmoil in the Jesuit order throughout the world bypassed the red-bricked buildings nestling snugly at the end of O'Connell Street. Maverick priests and 'progressive' theologians were always headed off into other more responsive pastures. Crescent pupils were renowned for their 'respectability', and the past pupils for their safe, orthodox views. College 'old boys' flowed continuously into the business, legal and medical life of Limerick, to take their carefully and long cherished places in family shops, solicitor's offices and doctor's consulting rooms, between the O'Connell Monument and Todds. The Crescent was symbolic of the Limerick middle-class ... as permanent as the Shannon and as solid as the Apostles' Creed.

Many people were, therefore, surprised to hear in early June that Crescent College was about to close.

'New Crescent Aims to Unite Society', the 'Limerick Echo' claimed in marking the final closure of the college which, it stated 'had a profound effect on the educational pattern of Limerickmen for 113 years.'

In its time the Crescent produced some notable people who went on to become respected and esteemed members of the community. It was an excellent recruiting ground for the managers of capitalism and greatly contributed to the continued exploitation of Limerick's working class population. The number of workers and workers' sons who were educated by the Jesuits in Limerick in their 113 years history adds up to a very modest total.

The Jesuits were entrusted with the education of 'gentlemen's' sons and very often were called upon, with the help of Heavenly graces, to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse. Fair dues to the Jays, they did their bit and today are justifiably proud of their boys. Ex-Crescent lads have

every level of Limerick life right up to the Department of Justice. Should the Jays be held accountable for the Limerick society they have helped to create?

It is a society disguised by a respectable veneer. Doctors, solicitors, politicians, personalities and other Creseent all-sorts have long formed the 'elite' of Limerick. Their influence on Limerick life has been pervasive. Their actual contribution, however, is that while they pay lip-service to the supposed values and Christian principles instilled by the-Jesuits, they apply their educations and intelligence to preserve the present unjust and unequal system.

The 'Echo' mentioned some of the famous names and patronisingly poured praise on the monument of class distinction. The business interests and advertising perks demands that newspapers react in a grovelling manner in marking the demise of this 'great educational' establishment.

continued overleaf

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coalition courtship

THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT by the Leader of the Labour Party, Brendan Corish, on the need for a coalition pact with Fine Gael will hardly come as a surprise to many people.

What did surprise some people, however, was the grovelling manner in which Corish openly crawled in desperation before Liam Cosgrave, who only a few weeks earlier, at the Fine Gael Ard Fheis, publicly reprimanded Corish and his party for involving themselves with 'subversive elements' during the anti-EEC campaign. Maybe it was because of this reprimand that Corish acted so quickly. He has now demonstrated that he was just as much a respectable capitalist as Cosgrave and that Labour's mild flirtation with the 'subversives' was finished.

From a socialist viewpoint there is nothing illogical about the proposed coalition pact, as the vast majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party would not be out of place in Fine Gael. The Labour Party has within its ranks such deputies as Spring, Coughlan, Tracey, Murphy and Tully, all of whom are as much opposed to socialism as is Cosgrave himself. As well as these deputies there are a number of careerist politicians in the Labour Party who are unwilling to remain on the Opposition benches for an indefinite period. These deputies see

the proposed coalition as their only opportunity of achieving any sort of 'power'. All they ever talk about is changing the Government and at no time do they talk about changing the system.

The Leader of the Party, Corish, must rank as the most slippery and dishonest Leader in the history of the Labour Party. In 1968 he said: 'At the next General Election Labour will continue to fight as an independent political party as it has done in the last two General Elections.'

'Talk of coalition is merely a Government tactic to divert attention from the new politics. We now have a three-party system in which each party is seeking to form a Government of its own. Coalition is a throw-back to the safe politics of the 'forties and 'fifties. We have our eyes on the 'seventies and the formation of a Labour Government. No matter what happens to the two Civil War parties the young people, in particular, will ensure that Labour continues to grow at an even faster pace.'

'This is Labour's hour. The future of the Left in Ireland is power under a Labour Government. The 'seventies will be socialist.' (From the article, 'Labour - Where Now?' by Brendan Corish, 'Nusight', November, 1968).

Of course Corish will not say that the real role of the Labour 'Left' in the

'seventies will be that of clinging to the coat-tails of the left-wing stalwart Liam Cosgrave.

Then, at the 1969 Annual Conference, Corish had this to say: 'Last year, Annual Conference rightly decided, in my opinion, against participating in coalition government in present conditions. This was a democratic choice of the entire party, which at the time I supported and will continue to uphold as long as I am leader of the Party. If Conference should in the future decide, by democratic choice to change its mind, I will, as I have consistently done since I became a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party, twenty-four years ago, accept that decision. But the party must appreciate that to me this is a matter of conscience and that in such an eventuality my continued support for socialism will be from the back benches.' One wonders what has happened to Corish's conscience since 1969?

It must be clear by now that the Labour Party can never bring about socialism. Those within the Party who desire socialism must now decide whether they are going to remain in a party which has abandoned the last shred of a socialist pretence or whether they are going to get out and set about the task of building a genuine working class party.

WAGE STRUGGLE

continued from front page

is nothing more than a means of controlling workers' wages within the lowest possible limits.

According to information contained in a statement issued by the Construction Industry Federation, on October 17, 1970, land prices had risen by 700% in the past ten years. This fact, the Federation claimed, was largely responsible for inflation in the 26 counties' economy. House prices have followed a similar trend in the same period. Defenders of the present system justify this situation by asserting that a person is entitled to get the highest possible price for a commodity which he is selling. This is the very basis of the free enterprise system. A person who owns valuable building land is, therefore, according to this view justly entitled to get as much as he or she can for it.

A worker is also the possessor of a valuable commodity, in fact the most valuable—his labour power. Just like all other commodities on the market, labour power increases and decreases in the price (wages) it can command in relation to the demand for it. But what happens when workers, organised in the trade unions, demand the highest possible price for the commodity which they are selling. Now, that's different, the Government and the employers (and the land speculators) say. The workers are told that they are holding the country to ransom, etc. They are told that free collective bargaining must be suspended and that a national wage agreement must be accepted.

The choice facing Irish workers is a simple one: they can throw away the bargaining freedom by accepting another national wage agreement, or they can reject this whole concept and fight for the restoration and expansion of free collective bargaining.

CRESCENT CLOSURE

continued from front page

It would be more truthful to expose the class-ridden social structures which give rise to influential institutions as the Jesuits and Crescent. Truthfulness and honesty are non-existent virtues in the Limerick press. Contrived rituals are implemented when an occasion, which demands sincere analysis, is represented for reportage and comment.

The formula runs through ... proudly the famous names are printed. The 'Echo', however, carefully ignored the men educated by the Jesuits who have ended up on the human scrap heap. Of course it is not the function of the 'Echo' to mirror society lest it should cause distress to the old Crescent 'boys' who are now the top dogs in the professional and business life of Limerick.

The punch-line was comprehensive Headmaster Rev. Thomas Morrissey stressing that the new concept of education would unite divisions in society. He was right of course as it no longer profits the home-grown capitalists to give religious orders a free hand with the young minds.

Industrial development in Limerick and the country generally sounded the death-knell of vocation-orientated education. Future education, by Department directive, will embrace a wider and comprehensive range of subjects including a special EEC course.

The Rev. Headmaster conveniently omitted that for years the Crescent has perpetrated class distinction. This distinction was shown in a tangible form. It was not so long ago that a red rope barrier divided their Church into two

sections; insiders and outsiders. The Rev. Headmaster made no attempt to examine the causes of social and class divisions before so readily suggesting cures. But not all the old boys fitted the Crescent mould. Dickie Harris, international actor and playboy, despite his success and wealth, could hardly be considered an exemplary past pupil. During the 1950s a priest named Malachi Martin taught at the College. Nothing surprising in that except today he is ex-Jesuit and plain Mr. Martin. He has written a controversial book, 'Three Popes and the Cardinals', which contains the prediction that well before the year 2000 there will be no longer a religious institution recognizable as the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church of today, (This Week, 25 May, 1972.)

So after 113 years of privilege and snobbery, the Crescent has closed. An old teacher who spent most of his life at the Crescent said, according to the 'Echo', 'things will never be the same again.'

The Limerick working class will endorse that view. For over a century the college has consciously and faithfully served a small, corrupt, back-scratching clique of local businessmen and professional people. Its hot-house education was ideally suited to the narrow commercial life of a provincial city. The change to economic free-trade and the country's move into Europe now make this type of education outmoded and irrelevant. The closure of the Crescent and the opening of the Comprehensive School, Dooradoyle is an intelligent step forward; it shows how the Jesuits are adapting to the changing needs of local capitalism.

what the buckley saw

'God bless the Squire and his relations,
To keep us in our proper stations.'

IT WAS CERTAINLY the most exclusive piece of social journalism in the 'Limerick Leader' since Seamus O Cinneide reported on the An Taisce bun-fight at Killaloe. The assignment was a challenging one for any young Limerick reporter: to confront and interview three blue-blooded members of the aristocracy at their ancestral seat of power at Adare Manor. The choice of reporter was an automatic one: Miss Helen Buckley, well-versed in social airs and graces, rose to the occasion in impeccable style. Her vignette of the nobility as parents even upstaged O Cinneide's salmon-sniffing act among the rather tatty professional members of An Taisce.

The low-keyed title, 'At Home With Elizabeth', had just the right, quiet, dignified air about it. The article itself was written in the very best of good taste and judgement, and exuded that essential reverence so necessary in serving our betters. Miss Buckley pulled out all the elegant stops and left no superlative unturned in matching her prose to the classical surroundings. Her story (June 10) set the scene in the very first instance:

'In a paradisaical nursery suite overlooking the banks of the Maigue, Ana Elizabeth Wyndham Quin, daughter of the Earl and Countess of Dunraven, is in her twelfth week of life.

'The baby, whose weight has risen from its charted birth size of seven and a half pounds and already measures over twenty-one inches in length, is coolly stoical about having its hours of nullity interrupted for photographs and looks like a tiny but bemused anachronism in its long flowing gown.'

Here the narrative picks up pace as Miss Buckley moves on to describe the small oasis of bliss, where the baby had spent her first twelve weeks:

'The flat relegated to Ana on the ground floor of Adare Manor, which was for a time inhabited by a member of the estate staff, has been completely re-decorated to produce a wonderful of baby folklore. It consists of a living-room replete with yellow curtains fringed in white, lemon covered chair, turquoise lino-tiles, lighter turquoise walls, blue chinz covered chairs, a picture, flowers in abundance, TV, a rocking horse and one of the Countess's favourite inanimate 'furry animals'.

'The main room leads onto a perfectly equipped kitchen a bathroom, a bedroom and the nursery proper. The highlight of the small sleeping quarters is the crib used by Lady Dunraven and her sister, and now done up by her in the flimsy loveliness of tucks of broderie anglaise, (bought in Cassidys') over a basic material layer of Temon. Hanging over the cot's side is a minute pillow embroidered with images of the infant sphere which sent out tones of Brahms's Lullaby.'

Miss Buckley allowed herself to luxuriate in the neat little haven and her prose rises to lyrical heights as she gives this pen-picture of the riot of colour:

'The room main colour scheme is red and white: the carpet being red and the walls, nanny's bed, the chest of drawers and wardrobe white. Diversely coloured nursery curtains hang over the window and material of the same design forms a covering for base of the bed. Handles on the chest of drawers and wardrobe are in gold. Inside, the wardrobe is embellished with Enid Blyton-type wallpaper characters. The murmur of the river and the presence of copper beeches and lighter looming verdure towards the river banks complete the sense of tranquil rural enclosure.

'On the chest of drawers is a collection of soft animals which encompasses most sections of mock nature, from a tiny, pink mouse, imported complete with a gold locket from America, to a richly clad Indian elephant, a product of Grafton Street.'

But the well-dressed and fashion-conscious reporter was relegated to the ha'penny place when she came up against the tiny infant, whose display of clothes was a complete one-baby fashion show:

'Ana's clothes, which her mother describes veritably as 'a marvellous trousseau,' come in every length and style and certainly size. A red Italian coat fringed in white lace, which Daddy invested in, will be kept cupboard bound for a while. So also, one would imagine, will the beige catsuit with its pale turquoise sweater. Among the other occupants of the wardrobe are two very lovely full-length Victorian dresses bought by the Countess for their 'workmanship', and because she does not like 'short dresses on tiny people, they could get cold legs,' at a sale of work in Dublin. ...'

Presents which Ana Elizabeth received were laid out in pleasant profusion ranging from 'tiny silver and gold bracelets to large ones (Geraldine Dunraven: 'With some of the large ones I requested the permission of the god-parents to wear them until she is older') from a miniature silver rosary beads in an equally sized silver case to an entire set, composed of silver brush, silver photograph frame ...' The baby was not, however, actually born with a silver spoon in her mouth, but she did manage the next best thing, by way of 'a Mother of Pearl teething ring with silver boot attached and a tiny silver comb.' But silver without gold was not quite enough, so 'even a gold nappie pin was included in the offerings. The presents were bought from Irish and British jewellers and some in Tiffany's in New York.'

But all this was just a little bit too much for even Miss Buckley and, like the servant tilting his cap at his master, she could not resist a slight tongue-in-cheek, but nicely-balanced in her concluding sentence: 'So whatever the latent characteristics of the little girl, known to her parents, among other things, as 'Charlie Bubbles', 'Ana B-a-n-a-n-a' and 'Buttons', few people feel any trepidation about her future security.'

As they say in proletarian Prospect: 'You can chalk it down, girl.'

But, taken all in all, Miss Buckley's visit to the Upper Classes in their Big House, was a remarkable success. Vulgar questions about commonplace trifles such as money, homeless families and social justice had been judiciously and scrupulously avoided. The working class was still a long way from the Manor gates. And the 'Limerick Leader' had, after all, allowed the lower orders the privilege of a glimpse of the Gentry's little earthy paradise. So the delightful images remain ... the gold nappie pin ... the silver set ... Ana B-a-n-a-n-a ... the Irish Constitution ... cherishing all the children of the nation equally ...

connolly's socialism

'THE IRISH middle class, who then by virtue of their social position and education stepped to the front as Irish patriot leaders, owed their unique status in political life to two entirely distinct and apparently antagonistic causes. Their wealth they derived from the manner in which they had contrived to wedge themselves into a place in the commercial life of the 'Saxon enemy', assimilating his ideas and adopting his methods, until they often proved the most ruthless of the two races in pushing to its furthest limits their powers of exploitation. Their political influence they derived from their readiness at all times to do lip service to the cause of Irish nationality, which in their phraseology meant simply the transfer of the seat of government from London to Dublin, and the consequent transfer to their own or their relatives' pockets of some portion of the legislative fees and lawyers' pickings then, as at present, expended among the Cockneys. With such men at the helm it is no wonder that the patriot parties of Ireland have always ended their journey upon the rock of disaster.' ('Erin's Hope—The End and the Means').

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'IN EVERY COUNTRY Socialism is foreign, is unpatriotic, and will continue so until the working class make socialism the dominant political force ... By their aggressiveness and intolerance the possessing classes erect the principles of their capitalist supremacy into the dignity of national safeguards; according as the working class infuse into its political organisation the same aggressiveness and intolerance it will command the success it deserves and make the socialist the only good and loyal citizen'. (Workers' Republic).

'LIMERICK HAS EVEN LITERARY associations, though not many. At No. 5, Clare Street ... died Bryan Merryman, the Gaelic poet. Admittedly Merryman was a Clareman, but so are most other Limerickmen. So little does Limerick know or care about him that not even a tablet marks the house.' Thus Frank O'Connor, who had something of a 'thing' about Limerick, described Bryan Merryman's connection with this city in his book, 'Leinster, Munster and Connaught'.

Merryman was born around the middle of the eighteenth century in Co. Clare. He became a school teacher at Knocknagheeha for between five and ten pounds a year. He also did some small farming to improve his income. He read a great deal of contemporary literature, and local tradition describes him as a master of Greek, Latin, English and Irish. He is a poet of one work—'The Midnight Court'. Frank O'Connor believed that Merryman was influenced by the Continental Enlightenment and stated: 'The influence of Rousseau is equally clear. How he managed all that in an Irish-speaking community at the end of the eighteenth century is a mystery to me. He was undoubtedly a man of powerful objective intelligence.'

In the preface to his 1945 translation of the poem, O'Connor wrote: 'He certainly had intellectual independence. In 'The Midnight Court' he imitated contemporary English verse, and it is clear that he had resolved to cut adrift entirely from traditional Gaelic forms. His language—that is his principal glory—is also a complete break with literary Irish. It is the spoken Irish of Clare ... Intellectually Irish literature did not exist. What Merryman aimed at was something that had never been guessed at in Gaelic Ireland; a perfectly proportioned work of art on a temporary subject, with every detail subordinated to the central theme. The poem is as classic as the Limerick Custom House; and fortunately, the Board of Works has not been able to get at it.'

The poem's story is simple enough. The poet goes out for a walk and feeling weary falls asleep. In a dream he is carried off to a fairy court, where the unmarried women of Munster are bemoaning their inability to get husbands. A good-looking girl presents the case for the women, and a little old man replies by relating a tale of woe about his own marriage and wedding night, when his young wife bore him another man's child. The young woman who had already spoken answers his charges by telling the story of the marriage from the wife's point of view. The fairy queen sums up and the verdict is given in favour of the women, whose first victim is Merryman himself.

The bailiff who summoned the poet described the court (translation by Frank O'Connor, 'Kings, Lords, and Commons'):

'A decenter court then e'er you knew,
And far too good for the likes of you.
Justice and mercy hand in hand
Sit in the courts of Fairyland.'

The bailiff then goes on to describe the state of the country and the commentary on justice has a present-day flavour:

'Old stock uprooted on every hand
Without claim to rent or law or land;
Nothing to see in a land defiled
Where the flowers were plucked but the
weeds and wild;
The best of your breed in foreign places
And upstart rogues with impudent faces,
Planning with all their guile and spleen
To pick the bones of the Irish clean.
But worst of all those bad reports
Was that truth was darkened in their
courts,
'And nothing to back a poor man's case
But whispers, intrigue and the lust for
place;
The lawyer's craft and the rich man's
might,
Cozening, favour, greed and spite;
Maddened with jobs and bribes and malice,
Anarchy loose on cot and palace.'

The bailiff reproaches the poet for not

the ideas of bryan

marrying and the suffering inflicted on the unmarried women by his kind:

'What matter to you if their beauty
founder,
If belly and breast will never be
rounder
If, ready and glad to be mother and wife,
They drop unplucked from the boughs of
life?'

The fairy queen having considered this situation,

'Arose and offered to do her share
By putting an end to injustice there,
And the great council swore her in
To judge the women and the men,
Stand by the poor though all ignore them,
Make might without right conceal its
face
And use her might to give right its
place.
Her favour money will not buy
No lawyer will pull the truth awry;
The smartest perjurer will not dare
To make a show of falsehood there.'

The first to address the court was the distraught and desperate young girl who describes her condition, and here Merryman gives us a sample of his open and uninhibited approach to sex:

'And to give an example, here am I
While the tide is flowing, left high
and dry.
Wouldn't you think I must be a fright,
To be shelved before I get started right;
Heartsick, bitter, dour and wan,
Unable to sleep for want of a man?
But how can I lie in a lukewarm bed
With all the thoughts that come into
my head?'

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SETTING; wide water in the background and the young couple holding hands over the headline 'How Will I Feel To-morrow?' The implied action in the scenic picture would, no doubt, leave the girl with a severe back-ache after a short term. The 'Limerick Echo' had other ideas and the issue of 17 June warned: 'We publish, next week one of the most straightforward articles on the approach to sex which has ever appeared in an Irish newspaper.'

This was a significant development in Limerick. A newspaper actually taking tentative steps in the sex education field. But wait—here lurking in the wings was the ubiquitous priest ready to provide the official seal of approval so that readers would remain uncorrupted. Like an elephant walking on eggs, the 'Echo's' approach was delicate. What mysterious and exciting sex secrets lay in store for the eager readers?

The week went tantalisingly by and then the issue of 24 June, hot from the presses hit the city shops. But sadly, the contents of the sex article were anything but hot, being nothing more than

a straightforward lift from the 'Readers Digest', with an introduction which alleged that up to 50% of teenage couples who marry in Limerick do so because the girl is pregnant. No source is given for this information ... but then does it matter when the 'Echo's' sex article turned out to be a load of American pseudo-intellectual codswallop?

The first paragraph of the 'Echo' introduction stated:

'Young people are faced today with complex problems because of the materialistic and permissive age in which they live. They are bombarded, day and night, by television and glossy magazines which present a make-belief world and set new standards of behaviour.'

How right this is, but the vital question is, why is it so? The changing society of Ireland; the liberalising influence of modern capitalism; the breakaway from a period of protectionism which gave rise to narrow and introverted Catholicism and the approaching integration into a common European culture are factors which have been

SEX

brought about to make Irish values acceptable to monopoly capitalism. Our working and non-working lives, our political and cultural systems, are dominated by financial interests; therefore, our every action is influenced by capitalism.

Why are 'new standards of behaviour' necessary? Why has the Permissive Society come to Ireland? Has it anything to do with the increasing industrial revolution and the waning of clerical and religious influence? Why has there been a half-hearted Government move, via Community Schools, to remove education from the control of the clergy? Briefly the answer is that Ireland is changing: from a largely rural orientated population to that of an increasingly industrialised urban work-force. Side by side with this development comes the changing emphasis on education. Heretofore, our primary

merryman

Indeed, 'tis time that somebody stated
The way that the women are situated,
For if men go on their path to
destruction
There will nothing be left to us but
abduction.
Their appetite wakes with age and
blindness
When you'd let them cover you only from
kindness,
And offer it up for the wrongs you'd
done
In hopes of reward in the life to come.'

Merryman's defence of the right of
women to sex and marriage, which he puts
into the mouth of the young girl, shows
him to be an early champion of women's
emancipation. The girl reveals all her
futile efforts to attract a man and
continues her evidence with a cry from the
heart on the pitiful plight to which she
has been reduced:

'But 'twas all no good and I'm broken
hearted
For here I'm back at the place I started;
And this is the cause of all my tears,
I am fast in the rope of the rushing
years
With age and need in lessening span,
And death beyond, and no hopes of a man
But whatever misfortunes God may send
May he spare me at least that lonesome
end,
Nor leave me at last to cross alone
Without chick nor child when my looks
are gone
As an old maid counting the things I
lack
Scowling thresholds that warn me back!
God, by the lightning and the thunder,
The thought of it makes me ripe for

murder!
Every idiot in the country
With a man of her own has the right to
insult me.
Sal' has a slob with a well-stocked farm,
And Molly goes around on a husband's arm
There's Min and Margery leaping with
glee
And never done with their jokes at me.
And the bounce of Sue, and Kitty and
Anne
Have children in groves and a proper man,
And all with their kind can mix and
mingle
While I go savage and sour and single.'

When the girl concludes her lament for
her unsatisfied sexual needs, an old man
starts up and begins his reply by abusing
the girl:

'Then up there jumps from a neighbouring
chair
A little old man with a spiteful air,
Staggering legs and panting breath,
And a look in his eye like poison and
death;
And this apparition stumps up the hall
And says to the girl in the hearing of
all:
Damnation take you, you bastard's bitch,
Got by a tinkerman under a ditch.'

The spiteful old-stager eventually
digresses from his attack by relating a
tale about a wayward girl he knew who
proceeded to go on unscathed to become a
respectable wife—if only with just a week
to spare:

'Is it any wonder my heart is failing,
That I feel that the end of the world
is nearing,
When, ploughed and sown to all men's

knowledge,
She can manage the child to arrive with
marriage,
And even then put to the pinch,
Begrudges Charity an inch;
For counting from the final prayer
With the candles quenched and the altar
bare
To the day when her offspring takes the
air
Is a full nine months with a week to
spare?'

The old man then gives an account of his
own experience of marriage and again gives
his bitterness full rein.

'A pity to God I didn't smother
When first I took the milk from my
mother
Or any day I ever broke bread
Before I brought that woman to bed!
For though everyone talked of her
carouses
As a scratching post of the public
houses
That as sure as ever the glasses would
jingle
Flattened herself to married and single,
Admitting no modesty to mention.
I never believed but 'twas all invention.
They added, in view of the life she led,
I might take to the roads and beg my
bread,
But I took it for talk and hardly minded—
Sure, a man like me could never
be blinded—
And I smiled and nodded and off I
tripped
Till My wedding night when I saw her
stripped,
I knew too late that it was no libel
Spread in the pub by some jealous rival—
By God, 'twas a fact, and well
supported:
I was a father before I started!'

Having given this account of some of the
dangers involved when an old man marries a
young wife, the deceived husband takes
stock of his position:

continued overleaf

ECHO

and technical schools were recruiting
stations for cheap, unskilled labour;
while the secondary schools were rich
spawning grounds for non-industrial
place-hunters and for priests, brothers
and nuns. But now this waste of manpower
and womanpower is being challenged by
modern capitalism, which recognises
people as work units capable of
increasingly skilled production. Therefore
our educational establishments are
undergoing a radical change. Witness the
new Dooradoyle Comprehensive School; even
the Jesuits are now being forced to throw
open their schools to pupils regardless of
social status or background.

Other factors are also contributing to
the pressure for these developments.
People professing to be 'liberal' play an
important part in the moves to change the
nature of society. They act as useful
agents of the capitalist system by

prompting the introduction of liberal
reforms such as contraception, divorce
and abortion. It will be only a matter of
time before these demands are met in
Ireland. To the forefront of this
movement we even have a few 'with-it'
clerics trying to change the deep-rooted
and undemocratic traditions of a power-
hungry Church, which by land deals, rents,
building and money collections supports
the economic system. The system
controlling this country is capitalism,
so therefore the Church, in supporting
the status quo, upholds that system. If
capitalism dictates changes or reforms
then the Church will eventually have
to concede and conform. At first it will
refuse these 'alien' changes, but, as
every 'free' enterprise institution has
its price, capitalism being an
experienced negotiator, will ensure that
the refusal will be short-lived.

Perhaps we in Limerick have seen the
first tottering steps in this conflict by
the actions of the 'Echo' and the 'daring'
sex article. The shallowness of the
'Echo's' attempt to liberalise itself
was shown by the spineless manner in
which it had to consult a priest before

the publication of what turned out to be
an insipid piece of codology at which
teenage readers must have burst their
levis laughing.

Some people may ask: Why was the
mysterious and unnamed priest used in the
exercise? The 'Echo' took the precaution
of lining up the clerical fall-guy to
fire-proof itself against a possible
critical backlash. This step made it
difficult for any 'outraged' layman to
object to the 'Echo' article.

Another sign of the 'Echo' efforts to
catapult itself into the liberal press
world of the seventies is the weekly front
page dolly-girl feature. The 'challenging
poses' of Limerick's lissom and leggy
ladies would appear to be the 'Echo's'
answer to the 'challenge' of the
'seventies. But we must be grateful for
small mercies, and the 'Echo's' break-
through the sex barrier is a milestone in
Limerick journalism. After all, it is not
so very long ago since the word 'sex' was
taboo in the local press. But, then, sex
and sadism have proved a sure-fire winning
—and profitable—combination in the
popular capitalist press. What price a
horror story in next week's 'Echo'?

continued from page 5

'So there I was in the cold day light,
A family man after one short night.'

From this he goes on to closely examine the untimely arrival and here Merryman rises to great heights in defending and describing the bastard child. The poet, surprisingly, lets these words of praise pour forth from the old man:

I off with the rags and set him free,
And studied him well as he lay on my knee.

That too, by God, was nothing but lies
For he staggered myself with his kicks
and cries.

A pair of shoulders like my own,
Legs like sausages, hair fully grown;
His ears stuck out and his nails were long,

His hands and wrists and elbows strong;
His eyes were bright, his nostrils wide,
His knee caps showing beneath his hide—
A champion, be God, a powerful whelp,
As healthy and hearty as myself!

The husband launches another attack on marriage at this point, but then once again returns to salute the child:

'Healthy and happy, wholesome and sound
The come-by-twilight sort abound;
Nobody assumes but their lungs are ample,
And their hearts are sound as the best
example.

When did nature display unkindness
To the bastard child in disease or
blindness

Are they not handsomer, better-bred
Than many that come of a lawful bed?
I needn't go far to look for proof
For I've one of the sort beneath my
roof—

Let him come here for all to view!
Look at him now! you see 'tis true.
Agreed, we don't know his father's name,
But his mother admires him just the same,
And if in all things else he shines
Who care for his baptismal lines?
He isn't a dwarf or an old man's error,
A paralytic or walking terror,
He isn't a hunchback or a cripple

BRYAN MERRYMAN

But a lightsome, laughing, gay young
divil.

'Tis easy to see his no flash in the pan;
No sleepy, good-natured, respectable man,
Without sinew or bone or belly or bust,
Or venom or vice or love or lust,
Buckled and braced in every limb
Spouted the seed that flowered in him:
For back and leg and chest and height
Prove him to all in the teeth of spite
A child begotten in fear and wonder
In the blood's millrace and the body's
thunder.'

As the old man concludes his evidence he has one last fling at the evils of marriage and speaks out strongly, even recklessly, in favour of free love:

'Down with marriage! It's out of date;
It exhausts the stock and cripples the
state.

The priest has failed with whip and
blinker

Now give a chance to Tom the Tinker,
And mix and mash in nature's can
The tinker and the gentleman!
Let lovers in every lane extended
Struggle and strain as God intended
And locked in frenzy bring to birth
The morning glory of the earth;
The starry litter, girl and boy
Who'll see the world once more with joy.
Clouds will break and skies will
brighten,
Mountains bloom and spirits lighten,
And men and women praise your might,
You who restore the old delight.'

The girl resumes her testimony and Merryman reserves some of his best poetry for this section. The poem builds up in a crescendo of thwarted love about which Frank O'Connor has written: 'The girl's description of the old man's wife begins in a mood of great tenderness, but from

this is mounts into a perfect storm of frustrated sexual passion which is almost untranslatable.' The girl tongue-lashes the old man:

'The talk about women comes well from
him,
Without hope in body or help in limb;
If the creature that found him such a
sell
Has a lover today she deserves him
well.'

Then Merryman goes on to consider his second great theme: the celibacy of the clergy. Here, as in the case of women's rights, he shows himself to have been about 200 years ahead of Irish public opinion. The girl pulls no punches as she roundly condemns clerical celibacy and lampoons the Church for this unnatural rule:

'But oye, my heart will grow grey hairs
Brood for ever on idle cares.
Has the Catholic Church a glimmer of
sense

That the priests won't come to the
girl's defence?

Is it any wonder the way I moan,
Out of my mind for a man of my own
While there's men around can afford one
well

But shun a girl as they shun hell.
The full of the fair of primest beef,
Warranted to afford relief;
Cherry-red cheeks and bull-like voices
And bellies dripping with fat in slices;
Backs erect and huge hind-quarters,
Hot-blooded men, the best of partners,
Freshness and charm, youth and good
looks

And nothing to ease their mind but books!
The best-fed men that travel the country,
With beef and mutton, game and poultry,
Whiskey and wine forever in stock,
Sides of bacon and beds of flock.
Mostly they're hardy under the hood,
And we know like ourselves they're
flesh and blood.

I wouldn't ask much of the old
campaigners,

THE LIMERICK SOVIET

JIM KEMMY

part 4

DESPITE THE WIDE COVERAGE in the wide-spread coverage in national and international newspapers the striking workers were not solely dependent on capitalist press to present their case. When the strike was called, the first decision of the strike committee was to take over a sympathetic printing works at Cornmarket Row. Here a daily briefing of the progress of the strike was prepared for the benefit of Irish and foreign journalists. The main printing activity was the publication of 'The Daily Bulletin', a news sheet which reported the strike on a day-to-day basis. On April 18 the 'Bulletin' stated:

'REMEMBER LIMERICK

Another day of the big strike has passed away, the strike committee were kept working at full pressure. Messages of support arrived constantly from all

quarters, and as time goes on determination grows.

PROFITEERS

A few cases of shops attempting to use the present crisis in order to profiteer and underweight was promptly suppressed by our pickets. We promise full exposure of any more such attempts in the 'Bulletin'.

UP THOMONDGATE

Our friends across the river are playing their part and have set up a food depot from which they will send supplies to the besieged.

Our besiegers are trying to spread the idea that famine is imminent, but the strike committee have made full arrangements, and can now guarantee an ample supply of foodstuffs. Hunger has no great terror for Limerick and we will show that we can suffer privation if necessary in the cause of freedom. All who are anxious to help should place their services at the disposal of the food control committee, Mechanics' Institute.

ARRIVAL OF TOM JOHNSON

Tom Johnson arrived from the National Executive of the Irish Trades Union

Congress last night and had a prolonged interview with the strike committee. He expressed his admiration at the lightning move of the big strike and paid a tribute to the magnificent spirit of Limerick. He got full information of the whole position and gave most encouraging reports of the situation in Dublin and elsewhere. We can assure the citizens that Limerick will not be left to fight the workers' battle unaided. For obvious reasons we cannot give further details, as our plans will be our plans, and the fight must go on.

SIGNIFICANT REPORTS

A surprise awaits our military autocrats, who in their blind and unjustified thirst for revenge on innocent people, have over-stepped the mark.

'Tis true that the British soldiers have been used in the past to do the dirty work of their capitalist bosses: men who enlisted 'to fight for small nationalities' have been forced to dragoon their fellow workers of course in the interests of freedom moryah! We wonder if anyone ever heard of rifles being turned the wrong way we mean, of course, the butt end to the front. Men like to fight men on equal terms, but when it comes to starving and

Good-for-nothings and born complainers
But petticoat-tossers aloof and idle
And fillies gone wild for bit and
bridle.'

Not only does the poet condone the activities of the virile canons and curates who break their vow of celibacy but he extols them for their consolation to lonesome women. He does, however, criticise them for devoting their attention to middle-aged wives instead of to the young unmarried girls:

'Of course I admit that some, more
sprightly
Would like to repent and I'd treat them
lightly.

A pardon and a job for life
To every priest that takes a wife!
For many a good man's chance miscarries
If you scuttle the ship for the crooks
it carries;

And though some as we know were always
savage,
Gnashing their teeth at the thought of
marriage,

And, modest beyond the needs of merit,
Invoked hell-fire on girls of spirit,
Yet some who took to their pastoral
labours

Made very good priests and the best of
neighbours

Many a girl filled byre and stall
And furnished her house through a
clerical call.

Everyone's heard of some priest extolled
For the lonesome women that he consoled;
People I've known throughout the country
Have nothing but praise for the curate's
bounty,

Or uphold the canon to lasting fame
For the children he reared in another
man's name;

But I hate to think of their lonely
lives

The passions they waste on middle-aged
wives

While the girls they'd choose if the
choice was theirs

Go to the wall and comb grey hairs.'

After this, the pace of the poem slackens, but it does blaze into fire in a few more notable passages. The girl finishes her story and the fairy queen rises to sum up and give judgement. Merryman renews his devastating attack on the Church's stubbornness in retaining the unhealthy and abnormal law of celibacy. He skilfully contrasts the simple, straightforward approach of poor working men to sex with the unnatural attitude of the Church:

'There are poor men working in rain and
sleet,
Out of their minds with the troubles
they meet,

But men in name and in deed according,
They quarry their women at night and
morning--

A fine traditional consolation!--

And these I would keep in circulation.
In the matter of priests a change is due,
And I think I may say it's coming too.

Any day now it may be revealed
That the cardinals have it signed and
sealed,

And we'll hear no more of the ban on
marriage

Before the priests go entirely savage.
Then the cry of the blood in the body's
fire

You can quicken or quell to your
heart's desire,

But anyone else of woman born,
Flay him alive if he won't reform!
Abolish whatever my judgement reaches
The nancy boy and the flapper in
breaches,

And when their rule is utterly ended
We can see the world that the Lord
intended.'

The court finds in favour of the women and Merryman is immediately seized by the vindicated women as an example of a man unwilling to marry.

'Steady now, till we give him a sample!
Women alive, his a grand example!
Set to it now and we'll nourish him well,

One good clout and ye'll hear him yell!
Tan him the more the more he'll yell
Till we teach his friends good manners
as well.

And as this is the law to restore the
nation
We'll write the date as a great occasion
The first of January, Seventeen Eighty

Fortunately, at this point, the poet wakes from his painful dream:

'And while I stood there, stripped and
crazy,
Knowing that nothing could save my skin,
She opened her book, immersed her pen,
And wrote it down with careful art,
As the girls all sighed for the fun to
start.
And then I shivered and gave a shake,
Opened my eyes and was wide awake.'

Though the poem is set in the year 1780, Frank O'Connor claims it was written some time later, probably around 1790. He also asserts that the influence of Robert Burns' poems on Merryman is clear, but other writers have differed from this view. It is certain, however, that Merryman never wrote again. Just before the turn of the century he came down from the Clare mountains to live in Limerick with his daughter and her tailor husband, Michael Ryan. The reason for the poet's move is not known, but it is probable that he was seeking greater intellectual and cultural outlets in Limerick. He continued to make his living as a teacher and appears to have specialised in mathematics. He died suddenly in 1805 at No. 5 Old Clare Street. His death was briefly recorded in the 'General Advertiser' and Limerick Gazette', of Monday 29 July, 1805: 'Died-- on Saturday morning, in Old Clare Street, after a few hours illness, Mr. Bryan Merryman, teacher of mathematics, etc.'

The mountain poet, about whom Frank O'Connor paid this tribute: 'When he died in 1805 in a house in Clare Street, Limerick, Irish literature in the Irish language made be said to have died with him,' passed away unknown and unhonoured in a strange city. And this position has hardly changed since his death, for his name and his poem are still unknown by the average Limerickman or, indeed, Clareman. He was certainly one of the most talented Claremen ever to cross the Shannon over Thomond Bridge.

His translator, Frank O'Connor, winding up the preface (1945) to the poem, 200 years after the poet's birth used the opportunity to make a last, bitter jibe at the Limerick of the 'forties:

'Merryman was ignored by Georgian society in Limerick, but in death he has taken a terrible revenge. The great, wine-coloured Georgian cliffs are being steadily eaten away by Rathmines Romanesque and Ruabon Renaissance. Nowhere else in Ireland has Irish Puritanism, such power. Leaning over the bridge in the twilight, looking up the river at the wild hills of Clare from which old Merryman came down so long ago, you can hear a Gregorian choir chanting 'Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum'. ('And to expect the resurrection of the dead') and go back through the street where he walked, reflecting that in Limerick there isn't much else to expect. It is doubtful if Merryman, the eighteenth century rationalist, even expected that final prospect.

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dragooning one's own class especially women and tender babes, in the interests of autocracy it may become a different story.'

On Saturday, April 19, the Mayor of Limerick, Alphonsus O'Mara, called a meeting of the citizens to consider the situation. A large crowd attended. Speaking at the meeting Tom Johnson, of the National Executive of the Labour Party, said: 'That the Labour movements all over the world respond to the call of Limerick. It was no longer a Limerick fight but a fight of the workers against military and imperialist forces. On the motion of Mr. Collivet, (M.P.), seconded by Fr. O'Connor, P.P., a resolution was adopted protesting against the imposition of the military area system, and demanding the instant withdrawal of the military cordon which prevented the workers from having free access to their work.' ('Irish Times', April 21).

The 'Irish Times' continued its attention. On April 21, it reported 'the decision of the Labour Party to give practical support to the men has undoubtedly encouraged them in their attitude. The fact is that the strike is too big for a small city like Limerick and it is bound to collapse

unless substantial outside aid is forthcoming. The meeting to be held on Tuesday of the Executive of the Labour Party is being awaited with keen interest.

The local committee meanwhile is carrying out its functions with a thoroughness and appreciation that have not hitherto been associated with provincial disputes. Shrewd judges detect in this complete organisation the guiding hand of Sinn Fein and, though there is no open alliance, there is complete accord between the political and industrial parties here. Defiance of British law affords them a common platform. Labour, however, takes care to keep itself aloof from politics lest it should offend its friends in Great Britain, whose support is adequately appreciated in the present struggle. One sees very few emblems of Sinn Fein here nowadays, and, except the daubing of the Treaty Stones in republican colours, there is no glaring display of the tri-colour. Many Sinn-Feiners rather than submit to the indignity of applying for military permits, have decided to remain within the prescribed area. Despite the temptations to spend Easter by the seaside, they prefer consistency to pleasure.'

poems

TWENTY-ONE

by Patrick MacGill

Dossing it here in the model, dreary,
bedraggled, dry,
They're cooking their grub on the
hot-plate, and I have got none to fry,
But still there's a bed for twopence, so
I'll go to sleep if I can,
Go a boy to my slumber and rise to-morrow
a man.

Twenty and one to-morrow, twenty and one
and not
A cent for the weary years that with
shovel and bar I've wrought—
Out on my own since childhood, down on
my luck since birth,
I who belong to the holiest civilised land
on earth.

I've done my graft on the dead line, where
the man with the muck-rake is,
Where the model smells I have dossed it in
this woeful world of His,
While others were spending their
springtime learning to please and pray,
I've fought for my right of living my
own particular way.

Oft I put cash to the bankers, banked it
and lost till broke,
Watching it tanner by tanner pass to the
sharper's poke,
And many a night in the hovel brag was
the game we played,
When I who was versed in the shovel fell
to a heavy spade.

Horses ran on the racecourse and won as a
matter of course—
I've lost a tribe of money backing the
other horse.
Beer, the hope of the dead-line! beer, the
joy of the soul!
Why should I pine and worry when beer can
make me whole?

And money is round to go round. Horses and
wine, and yes,
Women are fond of finery, women are fond
of dress—
Oh, pretty as girls are pretty, usual hair
and eyes,
Golden and blue, etcetera, choke full of
smiles and sighs.

Eyes of a luring siren, a hell of a
blarneying tongue,
Old are the arts of women, and I was so
very young,
Another came round to woo her, and sudden
she took to it,
I hugged a delusion in hairpins, got done
like a frog on the spit.

Seven years on the muck-pile--God but I'm
feeling sick!
Sick of the slush and shovel, sock of the
hammer and pick,
Labour endless and thankless, labour
that's never done—
Is it sinful to doubt of Heaven at
penniless twenty-one?

Not the price of a schooner, and, Lord,
but I'm feeling dry;
They're grubbing it up on the hot-plate,
but I've got nothing to fry—
Still I can doss on twopence, and I'll go
to sleep if I can—
Go a boy to my slumber and rise to-morrow
a man!

COUNCIL COMMENTARY

THERE WAS AN UPRISE at the last meeting
of the Limerick City Council when angry
exchanges between members led to an army
riot squad being summoned to quell the
serious disturbance.

The trouble began shortly after eight
o'clock when a deputation from Corbally
made an impassioned plea for an Olympic-
sized swimming pool to be located in its
area. The deputation told the Council that
Cllr. Vincent Meaney could supply the
buns and Cllr. Frank Beddin would be
employed as a nuisance to remind the
Corbally elite that there was such a
thing as the Labour Party.

It was at this point that voices were
raised and after some confusion Cllr.
Beddin was seen to remove his coat and
make a grab at the deputation leader.
'I'll destroy you ... I'll smash your
head in' Frank shouted. The Mayor, Cllr.
Gus O'Risko! tried to restore order but
only made matters worse when he mentioned
how he had considered employing Frank in
his lounge bar. 'He has a very presentable
and respectable appearance, he dresses
very well and he also has a ecumenical
taste in drink,' he added. Beddin, like a
charging giraffe, grabbed Gussie by the
throat and started to shake him.
Councillors leapt to their feet in mock
shock. The Pity Manager, sitting next to
the choking mayor, remained cool and
grinned dispassionately at the amusing
scene. 'Could I have a decision on the
last item, Mayor,' he politely asked,
While Gussie's eyes were jumping out of
their sockets and Beddin was going blue
in the face.

It was all too much for the Housing
Officer, Mr. Paddy Arcy, who leapt on to
the floor blowing his whistle, saying
that he had seen a foul and that Beddin
was playing hookey.

Ald. Pat Kennedy voiced his protest at
what he called 'disgusting and animalistic
behaviour'. But up jumped Ald. Mick
Flipper who said: 'Go away oura it, you
Fine Gael prize bull, that's what you are
a load of Ballinacurra bull'.

Ald. Kennedy started to cry and the
disturbance increased when someone
flung the heavy agenda at
the laughing Ald. Flipper. 'Oh ... my
good looks are ruined' he moaned and
lashed out blindly with his fist hitting
Cllr. J. B. T. Glasgow. The unfortunate
Glasgow, who took no part in

the row, had his pipe driven down his
throat and shouted 'Oh golly' in Irish.

A cruising squad car heard the commotion
and thought the itinerants were at it
again so they called for an army riot
squad. By this time, Labour Councillors
had taken control of the building and
went on a rampage of destruction. Some
reports said that Cllr. Frank Beddin
dragged Gussy around by his tie, like
Tarzan and Jane.

The troops, gas canisters at the ready,
formed up awaiting orders from the
Sinister of Justice, Mr. Messie O'Malley
who, staggering slightly from a nearby
lounge bar, laughed into the Pity
Manager's face when told the Labour
Councillors had taken over. 'What',
snapped Messie, 'a workers' revolution in
Limerick. With workers' representatives
like Mocklan, Pearls, Beddin and Flipper,
we won't have a workers' revolution in a
million years. Where's the CS gas?'
Messie demanded, 'it escaped', a soldier
replied.

Messie went up to the door, opened a
bottle of whiskey and let the whiff drift
in on the air. It proved more effective
than CS gas. The Councillors, eyes
watering, nerves shaking, emerged. The
occupation was over.

The three people awaiting outside
were told that a Councillor, while
making an eloquent speech on their
behalf, had swallowed his pipe and his
principles for Fianna Fail. The Sinister
for Justice staggered off to Corbally,
shouting loudly to his refined neighbours
peeping out behind their laced curtains.
'Workers I spit them ... Long live the
Irish Labour Party ... Long live Mocklan,
Pearls, Beddin and Flipper ...' The
seven Special Branch men, snoozing in the
Minister's garage were awakened by the
bedlam caused by the combination of the
Ministerial's boy's roars and the barking
of Corbally's prize dogs. The Branch
men, who had disguised themselves as
human beings, struggled strenuously to
shake-off the effects of their slumber.

The Minister's wife hearing the noisy
reception, and seeing Messie's condition,
reached for her record player. Soon the
happy and restful sounds of the Minister's
favourite song, 'Little Man, You've Had
A Busy Day', wafted gently on the Corbally
air. The man from uncle had arrived home.

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